

Smoke of Memory

Anne Beaufort

In memory I am falling, falling endlessly through space, in darkness, terror, and silence, and Mother never knows of the recurrent nightmare.

In memory the tumbling creek, the fresh mint growing beside it, the deer in the apple orchard at dusk, the beaver slapping his tail on the still surface of Mahl's Pond, the sound like a whip, cracking the silence as we gathered blueberries from heavy-laden bushes—these scenes are bigger than life, more magical than fairies or governesses who opened their umbrellas and flew.

In memory, sorrows soften, hurts diminish, unkind acts get plowed under in spring to turn up fresh soil. All that stung or jabbed gets broken up, reshaped, and renamed “experience,” or “wisdom.”

In memory, names, dates, words, numbers that once mattered get pushed away, buried, let go, like steam rising from a cup of tea, and what is left to drink is the taste of a life—bitter? sweet? mellow? smooth? But the curve of the cup in the hand, the feel of the cup's glaze, the hot liquid, aromatic, soothing—this too is remembered.

True memory is wordless, soft, smoky, deep.